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Book Reviews

The View from the Bridge

***Secrecy and Democracy: The CIA in Transition*, by Stansfield Turner, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1985, 304 pages, $16.95.**

This is a remarkable account of Admiral Turner's monumental effort to reverse the decline of the US Intelligence. It casts the admiral standing alone against the intransigence, ignorance, and proprietary interests of the CIA, the Directors of NSA and DIA, the National Security Council staff, the White House staff, the national security advisor, and the Secretary of State, as well as suffering a few disappointments at the direct hand of the President.

Following his dramatic arrival in Washington via Concorde from Paris in 1977, Turner learned that he was President Carter's second choice as the nominee to head the CIA. He had hoped to be put back into consideration as a future Chief of Naval Operations but, instead, was relegated to what he later told his wife was "the Bush league," a "family code" reference to George Bush and the CIA.

Admiral Turner took up his duties at Langley with the certain conviction that he understood the underlying problems of the intelligence business and the identities of the men who had caused them. Despite the protective counsel of the naval officers who acted as his janissaries, it became essential to make eventual contact with the "professionals" who peopled the Agency. Recruiting among this group seems to have been based on the principle that if they expressed themselves as lifelong enemies of his enemies, they qualified as prospective allies deserving of his trust.

Throughout the book, the admiral invokes his high ethical principles, dedication to democratic ideals, and his unswerving determination to rebuild on the shambles which he found on his arrival. To allow the reader a firsthand exposure to the problems besetting a new DCI, Admiral Turner successively builds and then destroys a number of straw men of his own creation. His proposals for change, modestly advanced as original thoughts, are mostly recognizable as ideas that have been under intermittent discussion for 35 years. His views on counterintelligence, espionage, and covert action betray an innocence that he somehow managed to preserve during his four years as DCI.

Innocence, however, does not explain his selective omissions relating to his authorship of a number of events that were ill-considered and harmful to his effort to bring respectability to Intelligence. The fact that he is prepared to accept credit for shifting the US focus to technical collection methods suggests that he remains unaware of the fact that there was recognition of this obvious trend while he was still a plebe at the Naval Academy. There has never been a credible charge that US Intelligence has been a demonstrable laggard in the field of innovative technical collection.

Among the missteps he admits, there always seems to appear an exogenous force to which at least partial blame can be ascribed. In several instances, lack of staff support and faulty advice led him, to his later regret, to suspend his better judgment.

There was an informed consensus at the time Admiral Turner took office that US Intelligence sorely needed corrective surgery. Among those who understood the problems, few saw them later corrected by Turner's measures.

For readers with a taste for historical revisionism and who are not put off by Admiral Turner's Olympian views or his highly subjective interpretation of his role, the book warrants close inspection. If, however, the reader's interest is in secrecy and democracy or a factual exposition of the CIA in transition, the Admiral's apologia might not lead to a better understanding of the issues, though it reveals much about the man.

Robert T. Crowley

R.T. Crowley co-authored, along with W.R. Corson, The New KGB: Engine of Soviet Power. *Crowley's intelligence experience includes 35 years in military intelligence, the Office of Naval Intelligence, and as an executive in the CIA.* ■ ☆ ■